

The Mind's Eye

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NORTH ADAMS STATE COLLEGE

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The Crunch

IN THIS issue of the *Mind's Eye* Richard Yanow makes some observations on the effects of the current economic situation on the kind of enjoyment of life to which Americans have become accustomed. Maynard Seider writes about the doubtful longer prospect in a review of a book appropriately titled *Small Futures*.

In this connection there came to mind a set of questions asked last month by a New York Times/CBS News Poll concerning the consequences of inflation and recession on personal finances. Banishing the urge to bury its head in the sand, the editor's household decided to put the questions to itself. The answers are reported here, along with the poll results.

During the last year, have you or anyone in your household . . .

- missed payment on a bill or loan because you were short of money?
Ed.: yes Poll: 29% yes
- reduced the amount in your family's major savings account?
Ed.: yes Poll: 61% yes
- delayed moving or buying a house because of high housing or mortgage costs?
Ed.: no Poll: 34% yes
- been laid off from work?
Ed.: no Poll: 18% yes

In the last year or so, have you . . .

- cut back on the amount of gasoline you buy?
Ed.: no Poll: 80% yes
- lowered the heat in your home?
Ed.: yes Poll: 86% yes
- cut back on the quality of food you buy?
Ed.: yes Poll: 54% yes
- cut back on vacations?
Ed.: yes Poll: 66% yes
- cut back on the number of times you eat out in restaurants?
Ed.: yes Poll: 68% yes
- or any adult in your household supplemented the family income by working longer hours or getting a new or a second job?
Ed.: yes Poll: 44% yes

With a couple of variations, the editorial household and the poll responders come out very much alike. The only significant difference is in gasoline consumption. Being a foreign car family and being locked into a long commute to both work and shopping, we have yet to budge much in this respect. But we find ourselves wondering about it.

Our answers, though not unexpected, were something of a shock, not so much for the perceptible pinch presently felt as for what may happen as things get worse.

—Charles McIsaac

The Quality of Life Equation

by Richard Yanow

IN A SYMPOSIUM held during Winter Study at North Adams State College five participants explored the meaning of the concept of the quality of life from the perspectives of history, sociology, economics, the physical sciences, and television advertising. While use of the term "quality of life" is much in vogue today, it was soon apparent that a common definition would elude the panel since how each discussant measured it depended importantly on his own values and priorities.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of definition, there are a number of factors at work today which are clearly having a significant impact on the quality of life of an increasing number of Americans. In fact, when I was first approached to contribute to the symposium from the vantage point of business and finance, my major problem was in choosing among the many factors that could easily and appropriately be addressed. It is therefore important to stress at the outset that the factors on which I have chosen to focus are neither exhaustive of, nor necessarily predominant in, any given individual's quality of life equation. Nor do I suggest that these considerations should be regarded as the sole keys to how one views his or her life satisfaction. They are, however, very real influences, often of great immediate significance, and I believe applicable to a growing number of people.

Inflation

IT IS CLEAR that the sharply rising cost of virtually all consumer goods and services is causing shifts in our spending patterns as well as fueling anxiety about our financial well-being, both present and future. It is a rare person indeed who today is not either cutting back on overall outlays or changing spending/savings patterns in line with the inflation psychology which impels him to forgo savings in order to purchase costly items that will cost much more next year. Even here, though, there is a



Richard Yanow, Instructor of Business Administration, teaches finance, investment, and marketing. Prior to coming to North Adams State College Mr. Yanow lived in New York City, working for several major corporations in the fields of investment and consumer marketing.

problem, since mounting inflation will continue to erode the discretionary income [income available after payment of taxes and the purchase of necessities] available to follow this strategy.

The significance of the reduction of discretionary income—and, with it, the concurrent increase in financial anxiety—lies not so much in the diminishing value of one's present resources as in the poor outlook for salary increases sufficient to keep pace with inflation. To get specific, one need not be a psychological or financial guru to appreciate fully the deep concerns of college faculty about their present and future financial well-being. An inflation rate approaching 20% in the setting of a college budget climate restricting salary increases to around 8% is a profoundly disturbing prospect. Further exacerbating this problem for teachers and others employed in "income-resistant" occupations is the relative lack of upward job mobility (due to a variety of factors) as well as the fact that most have been unable to accumulate sufficient funds to supplement salary with meaningful investment income. An important result of all this is the preponderance of two-paycheck families and an increase in moonlighting. While it is true that many find these jobs personally meaningful, there is no doubt that others are paying a high price to do all this "hustling," particularly in its effect on the quality of family relationships.

Family Size

THERE has been a pronounced trend in recent years towards smaller families. While the decision to have fewer children reflects changing values regarding family size, there is little question that financial considerations have also played a major role. Many couples have simply decided that they can afford only one or two children, that to have more would result in an unacceptable level of overall stinting and financial pressure. Certainly, financial considerations have always been a factor in family planning, though one usually pretty far down the list. No more.

A related trend—similar in some aspects, quite different in others—has

been the dramatic increase in the number of couples who choose to remain childless. This has been most noticeable among career-oriented couples residing in the large metropolitan areas but it is certainly not limited to this group. The rationale behind this trend can perhaps be illustrated by looking at a typical example of such a couple. In their late twenties or early thirties, both have "meaningful" jobs with a combined income of \$50,000 (a very common big city figure). They are able to thumb their noses at inflation and lead the "good life." Further, and quite importantly, they have immense personal freedom to pursue their careers and pleasures with a minimum of distraction or inconvenience. What would the decision to have a child entail? First, the wife's paycheck is gone and they are down to \$25,000-\$30,000. Second, they've got the child-related expense. And, third, they face quite an emotional adjustment scaling down a \$50,000 lifestyle to one of \$25,000, particularly in a city. Add to these financial factors several other elements. The wife's job was important personally as well as financially. This reward is gone—at least typically (though not always) for a few years. And so is the ability to travel freely, to pick up and go as the mood strikes.

But there is even more to it. The entire concept of what it means to be a whole, fulfilled person, to lead a meaningful, satisfying life, is undergoing change. I don't think there is any question that a major motivation in a couple's decision to have children has often been societal and family pressure. It was necessary and expected. The discomfort and feelings of inadequacy engendered by family and peers were frequently reason enough to prevent a couple from deciding rationally whether they really wanted children. As these attitudes slowly change, so does the ability of a growing number of couples to vote their real feelings on having children.

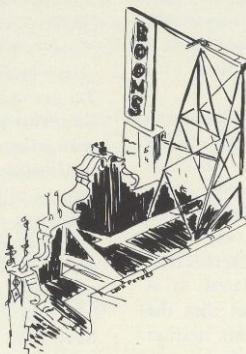
Housing Inflation

WHILE I have already touched on some of the implications of overall inflation, I think it important to single out the area of housing-related inflation for particular emphasis. Its ramifications tend to be quite striking in a number of interesting ways. To put housing inflation in perspective, let us first consider the following factors: the price of houses has climbed dramatically over the past few years; the cost of similar homes varies significantly from one geographical area to another; mortgage interest rates have increased in the past two years from around 8% to 15%-17% presently; simply getting mortgage money is more difficult (banks are requiring a higher down payment, are being

more selective in the granting of mortgages, and often charge "points" which further adds to the cost); the cost of maintaining a home, particularly of heating it, has risen sharply. Now let us examine some of the implications of all this.

Young Families

INCREASINGLY, young families are finding it financially impossible to buy their first house. The problem is usually their inability to make the down payment. Assume a very modest home in a metropolitan area priced at \$50,000. Even if a couple qualifies for a



mortgage based on their income, a typical 75% mortgage requires a \$12,500 down payment plus closing costs (which can be high). Given the general inflation problem, few have been able to save this much. If they cannot, or will not, borrow from family, they simply cannot swing it. And even more demoralizing, if we assume a continued rise in housing prices, for most the future scenario will be the same no matter how they scrimp and save. Given the traditional importance of "owning one's own home" in the quality of life equation of most people, we can see the emotionally frustrating result of this to a growing number of young people.

Reduction of Discretionary Income

I HAVE focused on the down payment problem because it is the major deterrent for most young people (it should be pointed out that although government backed FHA and VA mortgages requiring minimal down payments do exist they are not widely obtainable). The other major aspect of housing inflation is the high cost of carrying a home today. The traditional yardstick used by bankers and financial advisers to evaluate mortgage applicants is that a maximum of 25% of gross monthly income should go for housing-related expenses (mortgage payments, taxes, insurance, utilities, maintenance). Recent statistics indicate that in many areas of the country this figure has ballooned to 35%-40%. While sharply higher housing-related expenses have caused this, the willingness of so many people to opt for this burden is based, I believe, on two factors. The first is "inflation psychology" (I'd better buy now or I'll never be able to); the second, the belief that to look at these costs simply as "expenses" belies the investment merits of the purchase. This relatively recent attitude has proven remarkably profitable in many cases. In fact, it is ironic that many conscientious adherents to the traditionally prudent 25% rule of thumb, who postponed housing purchases until they could "afford" it, now find themselves behind the housing eight ball, left in the

dust by their more risk-taking contemporaries.

Although homeowners are figuratively sitting on a lot of money, such money represents a paper profit which becomes real only when they sell. Thus, the fact remains that many people are now house-poor, with discretionary income so crimped by housing expenses that there is little left with which to live comfortably and enjoyably. And always close to mind, given the size of their fixed housing costs, is the realization that any significant loss of income, for whatever reason, would portend big problems.

Job Mobility

AN ARTICLE in a recent issue of the *Chronicle of Higher Education* quoted a department chairman at a prestigious California university lamenting the difficulty he was having in recruiting new faculty. Despite the prestige of the school and the career advancement the jobs entailed, the housing factor was predominant. It is not hard to see why. Assume the candidate is a faculty member at North Adams State College living in a house bought a few years ago with an 8% mortgage, and that its present market value is \$50,000. A comparable house in California would cost \$125,000-\$150,000 the new mortgage interest rate would go to 16%—plus points, plus two closing costs, plus moving expenses (usually). Even throwing in a good profit on the sale of the house, just coming up with the new down payment would be very difficult if not impossible, never mind handling the sharply higher carrying costs. True, California's housing market is extreme; but the example is directionally similar to the situation in almost every major metropolitan area in the country. Further compounding the problem is the fact that faculty mobility usually results in relatively small salary increases, rarely coming anywhere close to bridging the housing expense gap. In fact, even major corporations—with their ability and willingness to grant hefty raises and absorb moving costs—are finding it increasingly difficult to get their managers to accept transfers to high housing cost areas.

A year ago a doctor friend from Williamstown accepted a position with a hospital in the Washington,

D.C. area. He and his wife went house hunting and after considerable shock and anguish finally bought a house for \$120,000 which they graphically describe as "your basic house." Well, he is a doctor and we all know how much *they* make. Many working in Washington are less fortunate financially. Indeed, much has been written recently about the difficulty the federal government has been having in attracting good middle-management people due to the "bananas" housing market.

It is important to emphasize that restraints on job mobility—and with it the reorientation of a family's priorities—are certainly not limited to financial considerations. Another significant factor is the growing recognition and acceptance of women's career aspirations. Until fairly recently job mobility in a family pretty much meant the husband's career moves. In spite of her personal feelings and trepidations, it was the rare wife indeed who would not go along with a move if it meant a promotion for her husband. And it was the unusual husband who considered his wife's "situation" an important factor to be weighed in such a decision. That is changing, and quite rapidly. In many cases, moreover, the key is not the size of the wife's paycheck but the personal satisfaction she derives from her job and the weight this is given in the overall family situation. The recent movie *The Seduction of Joe Tynan* dealt quite effectively with this issue.

Finally, there is a new emphasis being laid on other qualitative aspects of life. Articles in the *Wall Street Journal* and other business periodicals have cited the growing number of business executives who are refusing promotional transfers not for financial reasons or any lack of normal ambition but for a variety of qualitative reasons. These include not wanting to move to areas having a harsh climate or long commuting distances and a disinclination to leave good friends (their own, their wives', their kids'), family, an enjoyable community atmosphere, good schools, cultural resources—whatever. In effect, they are asking themselves the age-old questions, What's important to me? Where do my real satisfactions lie? And many are coming up with nontraditional answers.

In Search of Cape Cod Food and Its History

How It Happened that I Wrote a Book

by Andrew S. Flagg

Editor's Note. Andrew S. Flagg taught art at North Adams State College from 1937 to 1965 and finished his years at the college as its president from 1966 to 1969.

Stepping down from the presidency proved to be the beginning of another career, for last summer Mr. Flagg published The Story of Cape Cod Cooking.

an unusual cookbook which sets forth recipes in the background of the culinary history of Cape Cod, pleasing the mind as well as the palate. The recipes are pleasing, as well, to cooks, one of whom has been heard to say, "They're so easy—and good."

Andy Flagg was known and loved in North Adams as a teacher, artist, wit, and friend. His generous human qualities shine through the graceful style of his book and illuminate his account of how it came to be written.

IT ALL STARTED on a beautiful day in May eleven years ago. I was exhilarated by the too-warm-for-May weather, by the fresh clear Cape Cod air, and by the thought that even though I loved my work I would be retired in a couple of months.

I had spent countless weekends searching for my retirement home and, finally, arrived on the Cape. After enjoying the beauty of the Berkshires for over thirty years, I had promised myself a home either on the water or where I could see the water. It also had to be a home where I could live with little more than a screwdriver and a tack hammer—no lawn mowers and snow shovels for me.

A newspaper advertisement brought me to the Cape on that weekend to look at an apartment. The ad was very ordinary and mentioned the usual "wall-to-wall carpets, security, privacy," just like so many others I had read. But this one ended with the statement that the apartment was "naturally air-conditioned by the breezes from the Cape Cod Canal." Remembering how I had enjoyed those breezes—and many other things about the area—during my younger years, I think I knew I was heading home as I drove into the parking lot. Within ten minutes I had signed a lease and the search was over.

A short while later I was in a fine nearby restaurant feeling that the world was a wonderful place and thinking how glad I was to be in it. As I sat contentedly sipping a well-chilled martini, I noticed that the back of the menu contained a list of statements regarding Cape Cod. One of them caught my eye. It said that the Cape Cod Canal was "the busiest canal in the world." I remembered the great number of ships I had seen waiting for passage through the Panama Canal and wondered. Could this be true or was it only Chamber of Commerce talk? At that moment my dinner was served and my thoughts were directed to some beautifully cooked fish which seemed more worthy of my attention.

Four or five months later I was sitting on the deck of my new apartment. (They are always called "decks"

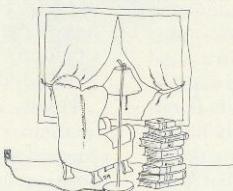
here—never porches or balconies—just decks). As I sat watching the two-way parade of vessels passing before me—little bobbing pleasure craft, graceful sailboats, fishing boats, gleaming white Coast Guard cutters, tough stubby tugs hauling clumsy barges, freighters surrounded by an air of mystery much thicker than the scarred paint on their battered hulls, and tankers named by their corporate owners after states or animals—I thought about "the busiest canal in the world."

The next day, still curious, I visited our local library and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Headquarters from where all the traffic passing through the Canal is monitored and controlled. I returned home with maps, tide tables, pamphlets, folders, and reports along with notes I had scribbled in the library. I also had a few books which mentioned the Canal. I not only learned the number of craft and the tons of shipping which passed through the Canal in a year, but I was surprised to read that Myles Standish and Governor Bradford had suggested constructing a canal here soon after the Plymouth Colony was established and that George Washington had authorized a feasibility study of such a project. This canal was becoming very interesting and was certainly worth more study.

I read everything I could find pertaining to the Canal. But, after reading a chapter or section about the Canal, I invariably browsed through the rest of the book and gradually became very much interested in the whole story of Cape Cod. After reading about a location it was only natural to want to see it, so I began to visit places all over the Cape. My life became a series of easy trips to barren beaches, old dwellings, cemeteries, harbors, shipyards, and other historic sites. Everywhere I went I found things I wanted to remember, so I began scribbling notes on various odds and ends of paper. These happy ramblings were all enjoyed without plan or purpose and the notes were about anything which I found of interest.

FINALLY, after three years of this aimless collecting of Cape Cod trivia I decided, in a rare moment of ambition and good sense, that I would have either to organize or dispose of these accumulating scribbles. I hesitated momentarily for fear that the shock of finding my desk in a neat and orderly condition might prove too great a surprise for my cleaning lady, and I knew I couldn't get along without her. But I sorted and saved and eliminated, showing great generosity toward the waste basket.

The pile of notes on the Cape Cod Canal was extensive but I found that some of the other piles, temporarily classified as Interesting People, Historic



Sites, Customs, Industries, Home Life, and so on, were surprisingly large. And I noticed that, scattered through nearly all of these categories, were memos relating to food. So I sorted again, this time establishing a pile labeled "Food".

The more I considered the subject, the more interesting the topic of food became. I was fascinated to learn the Indians knew the word chowder a hundred years before the Pilgrims landed. They had learned it from the Portuguese fishermen who came each summer to Cape Cod where they caught and salted fish. It was a mispronunciation of the name for the big kettle in which they cooked their meals. It interested me, also, to find that beans were traditionally baked on Saturday because it was not permissible to cook on the Sabbath; so beans, bread, and other foods which could simply be warmed up filled the oven on Saturday.

Questions began to arise. Like so many other youngsters, I had been allowed to grow up without distinguishing between Pilgrims and Puritans and I was surprised and a bit shocked to learn that the Pilgrims consumed great amounts of ale, enjoying it even at breakfast. Why was the Ale Master so important? How did they get along without milk during those four years before the first cow was brought here? Why did so many old cookbooks contain recipes using bananas? What was "Cape Cod Turkey"? These and many other questions, though not vital in any way, led to many interesting hours of searching for answers.

One evening I was telling friends of some of the answers I had uncovered. One of the children who had been listening with open-mouthed attention said, "Gee, Andy, I've got to do a project on the Pilgrims and I think I'll do it on their food. Even my teacher doesn't know any of that stuff you've been telling us. You ought to write a book". Silly kid! What a ridiculous idea. Me write a book? The rest of the family patted the youngster on the head and declared he had a wonderful thought. The father turned to me saying, "He's right. You really should, Andy". I laughed it off and said something like, "Maybe, some day."

FREQUENTLY after that evening I would find myself thinking that this fact or that story would be good in a book. Then the thoughts were changed to *the book* and, at last, to *my book*. The work began in earnest.

The concept developed of a cookbook which would tell the story of the background of a recipe as well as the ingredients; it would explain the "why" as well as the "how." Once I knew where I was going and how I wanted to organize the book, work progressed rapidly, most alwithout effort—except for the pounding of typewriter keys. Most of my homework had been done.

Everyone who knew what I was doing wanted to help. I had offers of old family heirloom recipes, advice on who could tell me about one kind of food or another, and even delicious samples.

I was searching for more material for the Finnish chapter and called a lady who operated a restaurant and was well known for her Finnish food. She said she would be delighted to talk with me and asked if I would like to visit her that afternoon. The restaurant was closed for the winter so I went to her home and, as I entered, was greeted by the warm aroma of freshly cooked food. There was still-warm bread, marinated herring, air pudding, and many tastes of her favorite dishes. She kept saying, "Now try this," as she told me about the food and how it was made. She gave me lots of recipes and told me where I could find others.

And that is the way it was. Enthusiastic help and encouragement came from everywhere. I couldn't have stopped if I had wanted to. When the first completed chapters were passed around for friends to read they were returned with more encouragement and enthusiasm.

Everyone was satisfied except me. As I read and reread each page again and again, I found things to change, things to add or omit, things to correct and improve, more work to be done. Just as the old recipes used to say, "Cook it until it is done," I was now rewriting every page until it sounded right, until it was "done."

AFTER A YEAR of this tedious and often discouraging rewriting, I decided that I had done about all I could. Good or bad, it was finished! I had the several hundred pages typed by a professional, wrapped them up, and sent them off to one of the biggest and best publishers I knew of.

Then I began thinking of what would happen next. I wondered what a rejection slip would look like. Was it a printed form—cold, heartless, and impersonal? What color would it be—pink, blue, or green? How would I feel when it arrived? When would it arrive? I waited, and I steeled myself for the worst. After all, what did I care? I had no intention of writing a book in the first place. It was just something to do in my spare time—just a suggestion from some little kid.

Then it arrived—my first rejection slip! And what a surprise! It wasn't a slip at all but a long, friendly, and very constructive letter signed by the vice-president in charge of sales. He explained that the manuscript was "cumbersome" and needed careful "shaping and trimming." He added that although it was "very definitely publishable" it would not be appropriate for his company to consider publishing it "at this time,"

explaining that they already had published a great many cookbooks and, since mine was a regional book, it would keep only one salesman busy. He ended by commanding me on the concept of the book and the obvious research I had put into it.

Hey, if rejection slips are all as constructive, friendly, and helpful as that, I vowed I wouldn't mind getting a dozen. I didn't receive a dozen—only six—and they were all about the same, but shorter. In one case, I was surprised to receive copies of the readers' comments. For a little over a year, the manuscript was sort of forgotten. It had been given the prescribed "shaping and trimming" and had been shipped here and there. Now, still in its battered box, it just rested on the shelf of my bookcase.

One day my cleaning lady asked what I intended to do with "that package" on my bookcase. I knew by the way she said it that she would like to throw it out or, at least, get it out of the way. That same evening a friend called to suggest that, if I hadn't done anything with my manuscript, I should try an agent. He also told me that, for a person as lazy as I, an agent who would do all the legwork was the only answer. The idea appealed to me!

Then it all got rather funny. The agent, who was said to be a specialist on Cape Cod material, just didn't seem to understand why I included background material. "Why can't you separate it and make one book of narrative and one of recipes?" he asked. One day he called and said excitedly, "I've got a great idea! It might be feasible to publish your material in magazine form, chapter by chapter. Perhaps we could convince a bank or market to subsidize the publication and use the volumes as a promotional gimmick. Not interested!

Another call I received was from an unknown man who must have gotten my name from the agent. He explained that he was a successful publisher of spiral-bound cookbooks which church and auxiliary groups used as fund raisers. For a price he would be happy to publish my book and I would "be free" to sell them as I wished. Definitely not interested!

THE MANUSCRIPT was returned to its place on the shelf until one evening when I was having dinner with friends. One of the gentlemen had been very busy

since his retirement and had published a number of articles and short stories. He had participated in the Cape Cod Writers Conference for several years and was acquainted with a number of publishers as well as authors. He knew "just the person for me" and gave me the name of a man who specialized in publishing books about Cape Cod. He told me that this man was highly respected by local booksellers as well as authors.

The publisher read my manuscript, liked it, and said he would be glad to add it to the collection of popular and authoritative books he had published. Within six months the first copies of *The Story of Cape Cod Cooking* were delivered and, three months later, we were in our second printing.

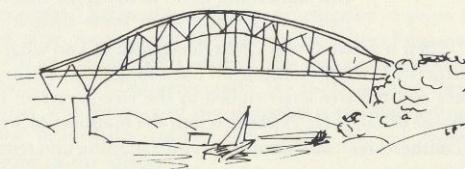
Between the efforts of Bill Sullwold, the publisher, and a few enthusiastic friends, my peaceful, relaxed way of life was completely shattered and I found myself involved with newspaper, TV, and radio interviews—even the awesome task of demonstrating the preparation of one of the recipes from the book during the allotted eight minutes on a popular Boston TV talk show. The owners of my favorite restaurant put some of the dishes from the book on their menu and sold over a hundred copies for me. I packaged and mailed six hundred copies from my once tranquil apartment in ten weeks. In the meanwhile, Bill was selling copies to every bookstore on the Cape. People were not only buying and reading the book, but they were buying extra copies for gifts.

I have to admit that it was all very exciting. I must be honest too, and admit the thrill I felt when I saw a huge stack of two hundred copies at the very front of the display in the Cape's largest bookstore. I will confess that the first time I saw that great pile of books with my name on them I loitered in the area for a couple of hours secretly watching people buying my book.

The future looks pretty busy, too. Since I was dubbed a culinary historian by one reviewer, I have been asked to talk at several historical society meetings during the coming months. There are several autograph parties scheduled for this summer on the Cape and the Islands, and the program for this year's Writers Conference lists me as a panel member for one of their sessions. With an ad appearing in the April issue of a national magazine I fear that my living room will become a shipping department—and I, the clerk.

Readers have raised a number of questions regarding a second, expanded edition, a hard-cover edition, and a second book. Maybe I will have to start working on another of those piles of notes! As I contemplate the coming summer I see less and less time to enjoy sitting on the deck and watching the ships go by. Watching is a much more pleasant pastime than writing, but who knows...?

(By the way, the Cape Cod Canal is the busiest canal in the world, with almost 15,000,000 tons of shipping and nearly 35,000 vessels passing through last year.)



Notes

From a Meeting of the Modern Language Association New York City December 1978

by Herschel Shohan

*Herschel Shohan is
Assistant Professor of English*

Again we gather in a sepia city.
We meet, embrace, make our news, news.
Wave to faces we know, hallo across lobbies
Walk the floor plan of the Hilton into our shoes.
Ascend to your room, my room
Cantilevered over winter boulevards.
All the world's a classroom,
And we teach.

Here on this dove-gray carpet neutral
As the sky we make the bland signs that assign us
Correctly to our places. The polished pendants
Of the chandeliers, the wall mirrors
Reflect us suitably, we think.

(Above us the Calder mobile moves and moves.)

By the Up escalator, I try to avoid
An old acquaintance. But he sees me
And we nod.
The warm young woman in the oatmeal-textured skirt,
Once my student,
Passes in the crowd, disappointed.
Others take her place. In the pale ill-attended
Meeting rooms we read and discuss the papers
Arranged in the usual parquetry of sessions, hours,
And interchangeable compositions of waiting chairs.
The subtle audience sits two rows away,
Amiably abstracted. In a cigarette haze
The patterns betray themselves in the old ways.

The city outside is a procession of screens.

The voice from the lectern reaches me through the white air.
I am the bearded man in the corner chair
Being attentive.
Nervously
We fold back the upper left corner of our first page,
Clear our throat and begin.

Or press through the revolving door, late as usual,
Carrying the ice wind from the avenue
In the folds of our astrakhan. I notice later
In the amber light of the Gold Room
The tooth's saliva gleam under the mustache
As you talk.
Bemused, I see the new veins
Under your eyes. We are disconnected;
I leave you at one party, find you twenty floors higher
At another

The last one at the cash bar.
Later, alone under the slant escalator

I lose myself by the *ficus benjamina*:
The sky-gray carpets lead nowhere
The Grand Lobby dissolves.
But morning is coming
I sense its first light behind the heavy curtains.
Here in this hippopotamus haunch of a sofa end
I am a young man who dreams.

Who Gets Ahead? The American Dream Revisited

by Maynard Seider

Small Futures: Children, Inequality, and the Limits of Liberal Reform, by Richard H. de Lone for the Carnegie Council on Children. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 258 pp., \$12.95.

RICHARD DE LONE, a former policy analyst for the Carnegie Council on Children, has written a provocative if uneven book debunking the American dream of upward mobility. The author covers some familiar ground in documenting the failure of the dream as well as the collapse of a number of liberal reforms that promised so much; and he notes the attack on the poor which ensued when the reforms fizzled out—an attack which William Ryan, in an earlier book, dubbed “blaming the victim.” De Lone makes his major contribution in analyzing the development and role of liberalism, an ideology which influences almost everything from major American goals to current psychological research. In the end de Lone comes perilously close to “blaming the ideology” as the single source of inequities in American society.

Ironically, de Lone is at his best, and clearest, when writing on the often fuzzy area of ideology. When he turns his attention, as he must, to the hard facts of social class and social structure, the clarity and logic of his work suffer. How much of this is due to the writer and how much to the predilections of the Carnegie Council on Children, and to the process of producing a book by committee, is an intriguing question. In his foreword, Kenneth Keniston, chairman and director of the council, tells us that *Small Futures* formulates ideas which both “emerged from and influenced the Council’s thinking” and that the book has been “greatly modified to take account of suggestions by the Council; and in its final form it has been approved by Council members.” Despite legitimate reader fears of what the result of that process might look like, *Small Futures* has survived in a form that indeed deserves our careful attention.

De Lone begins with a comparison of two second graders, each bright and attentive, both with IQs slightly better than average, but who are from vastly different class backgrounds. The likelihood of future occupational success for Bobby, a successful lawyer’s son, is much greater than it is for Jimmy, the son of a

high school dropout and part-time messenger and janitor. Here, as throughout the book, de Lone cites studies which support his arguments. One such study—applicable to Bobby and Jimmy—found that among children of the *same ability level* those from the top tenth of the socioeconomic hierarchy were twelve times more likely to finish college than those from the bottom tenth. These findings are indicative of two basic phenomena which de Lone comes back to time and again: there is great inequality in the U.S., and it persists despite repeated attempts to improve opportunities.

THE INEQUALITY itself, the poverty amidst riches, is not so much the issue. No American president, from Washington to Carter, ever promised us equal wealth. Equality of outcome is not on the agenda of the United States. What we are promised is equality of opportunity. Everyone, even those of low status at birth, can rise to the top. One’s own abilities are the key, and the door to opportunity will open to those qualified to pass through. As Woodrow Wilson proclaimed, “No man is supposed to be under any limitations except . . . *the limitation of his character and his mind*” (emphasis de Lone’s).

Now, if such opportunity truly exists, why does family socioeconomic status make such a difference, even for youngsters of the same ability levels, such as Bobby and Jimmy? De Lone answers by questioning the premise. He argues that equal opportunities do not exist. And he goes further. Attempts to raise such opportunities through social reforms have generally failed. So reads the record of the past. Moreover, the future promises more of the same. Given the amount of structural inequality in the U.S., attempts to improve equality of opportunity simply cannot succeed. No, Virginia, the American dream does not work.

De Lone uses data on the maldistribution of income and wealth to demonstrate the extent of structural inequality. The top 20 percent of all families receive over 40 percent of net income while the bottom fifth receive about 5 percent. For wealth, the picture looks even bleaker: the top 4 percent own 37 percent of all wealth while the bottom fifth own nothing. These figures describe a society neither middle class nor affluent, with more than a few pockets of poverty. The poor, who are still very much with us, include more than 25 percent of all American children.

The prospects for their upward mobility are dim. De Lone presents a host of historical and sociological

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studies which suggest the following conclusions: a) the probability of mobility in the U.S. has remained about the same since the middle of the nineteenth century; b) mobility from generation to generation is sparse, and tends to be restricted to just a few rungs up or down the ladder; c) the influence of parental social standing on children's careers has not changed since World War I; individual effort and achievement, the stuff of the American dream, has allowed only 20 percent of American males to surpass their fathers; d) finally, and significantly, bellying the belief in American exceptionalism, mobility in the U.S. seems no more fluid than in other industrialized countries.

Yet we hold onto our beliefs, keep trying, and blame the poor for their continuing misery. Why? De Lone points to liberalism, his choice of villain in this socioeconomic whodunit. For de Lone, "the contradictions in the liberal tradition are exactly what cause the repeated failure of many of our best-intentioned public programs."

THE LIBERAL TRADITION—not to be confused with that term's popular usage today—refers to a body of ideas which emerged in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe. Developed in the political writings of John Locke and the economic work of Adam Smith, liberalism found fertile soil in this country. Its main ideas are simple: the individual is primary and has inalienable political rights along with economic prerogatives; the individual's pursuit of his self-interest will benefit himself as well as political and economic institutions. In this, the best of all possible worlds, the individual and the society advance together.

After listing its precepts, de Lone can hardly wait to attack the assumptions and consequences of liberalism. In viewing society as a collection of individuals, liberalism ignores the power of classes, institutions, and culture. Its political side engenders equality while its economic tradition brings vast inequality.

Despite its faults, or perhaps because of them, liberalism has become the dominant ideology in the West. Not only has it supported and rationalized a growing mercantile and industrial capitalism, but its values are called into play to boost the reforms which emerge from time to time. From that perspective, de Lone analyzes reform movements from the Jacksonian era to the Great Society.

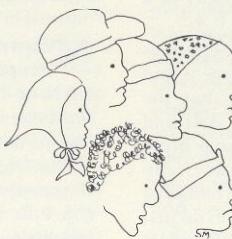
During the 1830s the ideology of liberalism called for rapid economic growth and individual opportunity to advance. Governor Edward Everett of Massachusetts spoke of the "constant operation" of "the wheel of fortune" where "the poor in one generation furnish the rich of the next." In a theme to be repeated over and over to this day, the school was to be that avenue of

mobility. Instead, wave after wave of immigrant children learned obedience, respect for authority, and punctuality in the common school, values which the industrialists and schoolmasters hoped they would bring with them to the textile mill and shoe factory. The ideology persisted to the Progressive era, and the even greater number of poor and working class children then found themselves subject to the new forms of testing which psychologists had developed. Although the tests and subsequent placement promised individualized treatment, a hallmark of liberalism, the biases built into such tests as the IQ guaranteed inferior status for the lower classes.

The schools serve as good examples of those reforms which, as de Lone so aptly puts it, offer "help that hurts." Strong class, racial, and ethnic biases pervade the American school, affecting everything from standardized tests to the decisions of guidance counselors. Consider the following facts: a) 90 percent of children diagnosed as retarded have no organic handicap but suffer from low socioeconomic status; b) 10-15 percent of American children are full or partial school dropouts, are misclassified, or are "educated in the juvenile justice system"; c) student social class is a better predictor of academic and career success than is IQ or aptitude. Clearly, schools stigmatize many poor children by tossing them out or by placing them in nonacademic tracks. And those who make it through the barriers still find roadblocks awaiting them in the job market. Woodrow Wilson notwithstanding, ability cannot make up the difference.

THE END RESULT of failed liberal reform has been victim-blaming. If the glowing side of the American dream is "the sky's the limit" and "full steam ahead," an equal chance for each individual, the flip side attributes failures to individual shortcomings. Victim-blaming led to genetic theories of inferiority in the nineteenth century and to the eugenics movement and the restrictive immigration legislation of the Progressive period. Similarly, the Great Society brought with it not only theories of "cultural deprivation," but a revival of racist interpretations of low IQ scores and the new sociobiology.

Some reforms have been beneficial to the poor—Headstart, Medicaid, and higher Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC)—while others have been double-edged. The juvenile justice system at the turn of the century, for instance, separated children from adult offenders, but it also saddled youth with such new and vague offenses as truancy, loitering, and incorrigibility. And through the liberal attempt to individualize cases, the juveniles lost the constitutional due process



guarantees which adults possessed.

Why has that contradiction stayed with us? Basically because liberalism, a "misguided" ideology, has so powerfully affected our values, our theories, our beliefs, and our very psyches. It is almost as if this ideology, by itself, has kept the present structure intact. Then, one might logically conclude, if we somehow straighten out the ideology, we could produce a more equitable structure. De Lone does not take it quite this far, but his singular emphasis on ideology gets him into some trouble.

Primarily, he tends to ignore power and class relationships. He forgets that the dominant function of an ideology is to maintain the status quo. Liberalism has certainly helped to do that, but not because it has been misguided. It is rather well guided in support of a system guaranteeing privileges for relatively few.

The very policies that de Lone quite correctly sees as bringing us closer to equality—full employment and income redistribution—are those policies that the upper class has fought against with great skill and determination. Should we expect them to change now? No, not unless we put our hopes in the logic and clarity of a good persuasive argument and ignore the reality of class power. Unfortunately, de Lone chooses to do just that. In his final chapter he suggests a number of welfare, tax reform, social service, and full employment policies. He computes the cost of the programs and the benefits for the poor. He shows, for example, that we can deliver more money to the poor by removing the multitude of exemptions benefiting the top fifth of all income earners. The simple result would be a transfer of funds and would not cost the government anything. "The obstacles," de Lone writes, "are *not* basically economic" (his emphasis). *What* they are he leaves vague. But, no matter the reasonableness of the author's arguments, neither the Social Register elite nor the Business Roundtable want full employment or a redistribution of wealth.

If de Lone stands guilty of ignoring the tenacity of the upper class in pursuing its interests, he compounds that error by expecting the government to exert its power on behalf of the poor. A close analysis of the relationship between the upper class and the federal government gives short shrift to that hope. One could begin by looking at *The Powers That Be*, by G. William Domhoff, the latest in his empirical investigations of the upper class. Here Domhoff describes the "processes of ruling class domination in America." In case after case, the very rich and their corporate representatives are shown influencing the candidate selection process, controlling policy-making organizations, moving their special interest legislation along, and spreading their

probusiness ideology. Whether one focuses on the social backgrounds of high government officials or the policies they push, in either case the poor remain unrepresented.

Finally, and significantly, de Lone fails to see the poor and the working class as capable of forcing changes themselves. They tend, in his view, to be objects of history, never subjects. But one may argue that just as class, as a relationship, helps explain the power wielded over the poor by the upper class, the same dynamic helps to explain how the poor can influence the upper class and the government. When reforms come about, it is not primarily because a few middle class progressives push for it, as de Lone stresses, but because the poor and the working class fight for it.

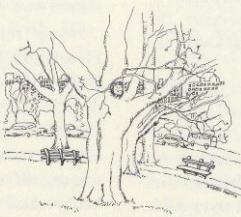
NOWHERE is this process better described than in *Poor People's Movements*, by Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward. Examining the role of political movements—unemployed councils, industrial workers' sit-down strikes, the civil rights movement, the welfare rights movement—in the period from the Great Depression to the Great Society, Piven and Cloward conclude that the poor make gains by the power of disruption. Disruption has historically forced private reformers and local public officials to press for national reforms, and with some success: victories have been won in union recognition, voting rights guarantees, and greater AFDC benefits, to name a few.

The poor can begin to push for change only when they reject the dominant liberal ideology, when they refuse to blame themselves for their economic problems and realize that they cannot advance as individuals. They must, in a word, reject liberalism. They become, in the eyes of the powers that be, a dangerous class precisely when they change their consciousness and seek collectively a solution to a system-wide problem.

An analysis based on class dynamics only adds to de Lone's message: equal opportunity to advance is impossible so long as the basic structure is unequal. What this means, though de Lone never says it, is that a powerful upper class fights hard with its wealth, corporate power, ideological dominance, and political control to stay on top and to guarantee a spot for its

own younger generation.* The poor and the working class can move only so far because the higher they aim, the narrower the pyramid becomes and the greater the barriers they face. Only during those rebellious times in American history,

*Harvard undergraduates underscored this point when, in the last quarter of a losing game with the University of Massachusetts football team this past fall, they chanted: "You may be beating us now, but in a couple of years you'll be working for us."



particularly the 1930s, when those on the bottom reject liberalism—and the validity of the pyramidal structure it implies—are they able to make some gains.

On the whole, de Lone has written a helpful book. Social scientists and humanists will find his exposition of liberalism well done and his critique of child development research and policy thought-provoking. And he has skillfully and empirically exposed the myth of the American dream.

DE LONE and the Carnegie Council on Children have been concerned primarily with America's children. Let me conclude by turning to their older sisters and brothers, the students at our state colleges. What does the end of the dream mean for them? First, many of our students still cling steadfastly to the "wheel of fortune" and perceive the college diploma as entree to the higher echelons. This is not to say that the degree, even as a paper symbol, is not useful. Without it, these young people would fall back. With it, they can stay in place, continually moving forward just to stay even. So the sons and daughters of machinists, postal workers, and typists will graduate to become data processors and accountants, civil service clerks and medical technicians. They may possess a bit more prestige than their parents, but their standard of living and lack of power

will be the same. A few will become managers and professionals, but just as many face the work bench, underemployment, or no job at all.

To those graduates who do move upward, the state college program will of course seem successful. It will appear to be a success as well to many onlookers in government, industry, and education to the extent that it satisfactorily serves the needs of the private sector. But for others, including many students, failure will be the verdict. The colleges and the students alike will be blamed: "They're not good enough"—"We're not smart enough."

What can we as teachers do at a time when jobs for our graduates are not plentiful and good positions are even more scarce? One choice is to perpetuate the American dream, pass it on to our students and wring our hands and blame the victim when the results come in. Or we can choose to remember the root meaning of a liberal arts education—to liberate—and try to free ourselves and our students from outworn myths. This policy will not guarantee anyone a job, neither teachers nor students. But, with an added sense of perspective and purpose, we all might work to change that structure that weighs so heavily upon us. *Small Futures*, critically read, points to a step in that direction.

Light on the Obscure

by W. Anthony Gengarelli

A Reader's Guide to the Short Stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne, by Lea Bertani Vozar Newman. G. K. Hall, 380 pp., \$32.50.

FOR MANY of us Nathaniel Hawthorne's work is a heavy meal of psychological contortion and moral ambivalence replete with an odd-tasting Gothic style lavishly garnished with allegory and historical allusion. Lea Newman's *Guide* is a successful endeavor to bring light out of the seeming darkness of Hawthorne's prose by delving into the author's recipes and ingredients, by comparing and contrasting his own works, and by illuminating the large volume of commentary which has been written about them.

She accomplishes her task in a deceptively simple manner by concentrating individually on Hawthorne's fifty-four short stories. Newman considers each piece as a separate unit, allowing the reader to approach one

story at a time. Yet, within every explanation she includes abundant references to seminal critical studies and to other stories and works by Hawthorne. The reader is therefore invited to pursue the subject further while focusing initially on a small body of material. Order and system minimize confusion but still provide channels for further investigation. She has, in fact, achieved her stated objective to produce a book which can "serve both as a practical, self-contained guide" for the average reader and as a "research tool" for those inclined to make an in-depth analysis of Hawthorne's fiction.

NEWMAN divides each story unit into four parts: publication history; circumstances of composition, sources, and influences; relationship with other Hawthorne works; interpretations and criticism. To experiment with the *Guide* I selected three of my favorite Hawthorne stories—*Ethan Brand*, *My Kins-*

man, *Major Molineux*, and *Young Goodman Brown*—reread them, and then approached the explanations. As a Hawthorne buff and student of history, I found the sections on circumstances of composition and on relationship with other Hawthorne works especially valuable.

I already knew that Hawthorne used New England history as a point of reference. I further discovered that his account of a witches' Sabbath in *Young Goodman Brown* was not only drawn from the Salem witch hunt of 1692, but was also inspired by the author's sense of guilt for the deeds of his Puritan ancestor, John Hathorne, a judge at the witchcraft trials. Another point of historical interest concerns the revolutionary setting for *My Kinsman, Major Molineux*, which resembles the Boston rebellion against the Stamp Act of 1765. Yet, the event was chronologically misplaced in the story, making it occur around 1735. Newman explains this historical inaccuracy as a "'calculated vagueness' . . . a part of the distancing Hawthorne felt was necessary when dealing with events of the comparatively recent past." Along with these intricacies, I discovered that the primary source for *Ethan Brand* was a trip the author made to North Adams, Massachusetts, between July 26 and September 11, 1838. In the shadow of Mount Greylock Hawthorne recorded the characters, scenes, and episodes that were later to appear in his story of that cursed wanderer, *Ethan Brand*, which was eventually published in 1850.

A N ASPECT of Hawthorne's fiction which has always intrigued me is the quest theme. His characters

often travel in search of something—the "unpardonable sin," their place in the world, the mysteries of evil. Newman demonstrates how this theme winds its way through *Ethan Brand*, *My Kinsman, Major Molineux*, and *Young Goodman Brown*. In each case the journey is a rite of initiation that leads along twisted paths to dreamlike encounters. Drawing on such classic literature as Dante's *Inferno*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Goethe's *Faust*, Hawthorne depicts his heroes as fallen creatures meandering through the labyrinths of hell and returning as significantly altered, but not always wiser and better, human beings. Newman's comparative analysis gives the quest theme an extended significance and, by so doing, suggests other avenues of interpretation. For instance, the journey encounter is not a mere personal rite experienced by the characters, but a social initiation as well, one that might serve as a metaphor of American skirmishes with the hellish nightmares of an urban-industrial world.

If my own encounter with Newman's work is any indication, she has indeed accomplished her "pragmatic" purpose: "If anyone who reads a short story by Hawthorne can use this guide to experience the story more meaningfully and completely, my project will have succeeded." Newman has produced a highly effective tool for the appreciation and study of Hawthorne's short stories.

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Ellen Schiff on Theatre

Harold Pinter's *Betrayal* and Martin Sherman's *Bent*: Possibilities of Being

IT IS PURELY by alphabetical circumstance that *Bent* and *Betrayal* have become neighbors in the current New York Theatre Directory. The juxtaposition is nonetheless felicitous. That determinant initial "B" appropriately plays on the verb "be." And *Bent* and *Betrayal* set out vividly contrasting paradigms of the possibilities—especially in time and mood—of being.

Pinter fans accustomed to taking their delight in

what seemed the British playwright's most firmly ingrained characteristics may feel betrayed by *Betrayal*. Gone are the menace that lurks in the least likely places and the shifting alliances that make it all but impossible to ascertain what relationships the characters have with one another. Gone, too, is the possibility that anything can be simultaneously true and false, a premise that deliciously complicates so many Pinter plots.

No such enigmas or ambiguities obscure *Betrayal*. This time Pinter tells the whole story. What's more, he tells it backwards. We know in the opening scene exactly what's going to happen. All we have to do is

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attend to putting the course of events back into their "real" chronological order.

That course of events is starkly banal. It recounts the breakup of a lengthy affair that Emma has been having with her husband's best friend, Jerry. The kinds of betrayals and their effects on the characters are exactly what we'd anticipate in this painful but ordinary situation. That predictability amounts to yet another departure from Pinter custom. The playwright has often dramatized betrayal, insinuating it into the most common human events: a homecoming, the reunion of former roommates, even the relationship between two hired killers. Since his first play, *The Room*, the disloyalty of husbands and wives (almost always wives) has been one of Pinter's most frequent motifs. But until now the disloyalty has always been approached on the oblique; it has spread stealthily so that by the time its victims recognize it they have already been deceived—or worse. No such subtlety shades the machinations of Jerry and Emma.

HOWEVER, it is the persistence of several of Pinter's most effective trademarks that raises *Betrayal* well above drawing room comedy. The first is the preeminence of the room. In play after play Pinter has asked both characters and audience to accept the room on stage as the sole repository of "the known." Because the room is all that is sure, entrances and exits take on an air of mystery or of menace; characters seem to be moving in or out of a realm unknown and unknowable—and, consequently, unspeakably frightening. *Betrayal* modifies that contrivance with shadow box rooms that swing into place for each scene, carrying the actors with them. Or, more accurately, director Peter Hall and John Burry, who designed the sets and the lighting, open each scene with the characters silhouetted in semidarkness, just on the edge of the set. They do not "come alive" until they plunge into the light of the room to live that particular episode. As each room rolls into place, we hear the disembodied, superficial clutter of a world beyond the play. In *Betrayal* that world outside the room is crueler than it was in the earlier works, for here it does not even take the trouble to confirm the characters' apprehensions by threatening them; rather, it ignores them—quite as if the hurt and deception depicted on stage did not exist at all.

Language is the second Pinter device that works to great advantage in *Betrayal*. By now we have come to recognize what can only be called Pinterese. All Pinter plays sound like all other Pinter plays—the dialogue sometimes halting, occasionally lyric, and always heavily punctuated with suggestive pauses and silences. Paradoxically, although real people rarely talk like Pinter personae, few dramatists succeed so brilliantly

in representing those thoughts that do often lie too deep for words. Pinter once described speech as an "indication of that which we don't hear." From between or behind the speeches in *Betrayal* there emerge those hesitations which come when confidence fails or comprehension lags—the sudden, irrational, euphoric hope; the awful, dawning recognition of betrayal. Odd how the spectator can feel a lump rise in the throat and the pulse quicken in response to Jerry's recollection of a scene in Emma's kitchen when he tossed her small daughter in the air, and they listened to her laugh and laugh with delight.



PERHAPS the most outstanding feature of the New York production is the stunning performance of its three-member cast, directed by the incomparable Peter Hall. One might not expect to find Roy Scheider and Raul Julia in an English comedy; no matter, Scheider as the cuckolded husband and Julia as his wife's lover are just fine. Blythe Danner is marvelously appealing and sensitive. For Berkshire theatregoers, it is especially rewarding not to see her propelled breathlessly about the stage, as she invariably is by Nikos Psacharopoulos in his pursuit of the fastest Chekhov in the West.

With *Betrayal*, Harold Pinter demonstrates once again that he can mine an uncommonly good play out of the commonest ore. Nonetheless, the new work falls short of the earlier successes where the dramatization of the quotidian-in-its-room was punctuated with the opening and closing of doors which allowed a glimpse of the mysterious menace outside. That was a vision that triggered an audience's most primitive fears, and so created foreboding that transcended the focus of the play. *Betrayal*, by contrast, so engrosses us that we lose sight of the terrors that stalk in the beyond. That false sense of security lulls us into letting down our guard—and so perhaps amounts to a betrayal of ourselves we scarcely anticipate.

MARTIN Sherman's *Bent*, a play about Nazi persecution of homosexuals, is the kind of work that makes the reviewer lament the overuse of adjectives like "powerful" and "gripping." With a *coup de théâtre* at the end of the first scene, *Bent* grabs its audience in a scissors lock that it releases only in the instant before the house lights go up. That *coup de théâtre* comes when the indigent gay Max reluctantly answers the persistent knocking at his door to reveal not his importunate Jewish landlord, but two jackbooted SS officers, their guns drawn. At this point in the performance I saw, a husky young man in the audience jumped to his feet. In a voice vibrating with anger and

fear, he announced, "I can't take any more of this sort of thing," and left the theatre.

That theatregoer's emotional reaction blends into the loud chorus of outrage, acclaim, bewilderment, and soul-searching provoked by both last summer's London run (which premiered at the Royal Court, Pinter's "house") and the current New York production. *Bent* is a disconcerting experience. It could hardly be otherwise.

TO BEGIN with, homosexuality is a disturbing topic most people prefer not to think about. Whatever progress modern society has made in learning to tolerate unconventional lifestyles, it still tends to regard homosexuals as, quite literally, queer. Martin Sherman is not the first American playwright to recognize dramatic value in that emotionally charged attitude, nor is he the first to compound its explosiveness by bonding it to a second inflammatory distinction. That achievement belongs to Mart Crowley. In his hard-hitting *The Boys in the Band* (1968) the most alienated of the gays describes himself as an "ugly, poxmarked, Jew fairy." *Bent* goes *The Boys in the Band* one step better: to homosexuality and anti-Semitism it adds the theme of bestiality.

The very intertwining of those subjects has fueled heated controversy. "Whose Holocaust?" asked a *Village Voice* article which discussed the sorry competition of gays and Jews for the title of "Most Oppressed." Protestors claim that by using the designation "Jew" quasi-metaphorically, the play distorts or devalues the only valid significance "Jew" can have in the context of the Holocaust. What particularly provokes these objections is one of *Bent's* most powerful scenes. In it, Max, who is not Jewish, explains to another gay prisoner why he is wearing a yellow Star of David, the Jews' prison badge, rather than the pink triangle identifying the homosexual. Warned in the train bound for the camp that Jews were treated better than gays, the resolute Max "fools" his captors and "proves" he is straight by performing an act so loathsome his recitation of it sends shock waves throughout the theatre. To take umbrage at his falsification, to bristle at the suggestion that Jews received preferential treatment in the camps, is to ignore history, not to mention the rest of Sherman's play. *Bent* makes it abundantly clear that cunning, bribes, and even extraordinary determination were futile defenses against extermination.

THE DEALS that Max makes at Dachau are not all repugnant or self-serving. He manages, for exam-

ple, the transfer of Horst, another gay, to the job he's been assigned, moving an enormous pile of rocks from one place to another, and back again. The task, while "safe," is patiently designed to drive prisoners mad, yet the rock-moving sequences bring out the best in Max and Horst. Like Camus' Sisyphus, they find that the experience challenges their imagination to defy the inanity and arduousness of the work. Their affirmation of life-sustaining values is demonstrated in a scene that is explicit in every sense of the word. During an enforced three-minute rest break, standing perhaps six feet apart under a blazing sun and the eyes of their guard, Max and Horst deliberately recall sensuality, then engage in verbal intercourse that brings them both to orgasm. For these Dachau inmates it is a moment of real triumph. "They're not going to kill us," exults Horst. "We made love. We were real. We were human."

However, Horst's optimism is eroded by deteriorating physical and mental health. Max's most imaginative ploys fail to revive him; ultimately, he is killed before his friend's eyes. Horst's death results in an epiphany for Max. Although he had always prided himself on being in control, on never needing anybody else, Max now realizes that he loved Horst and, before

him, others whom he never told. The sorrow of the irretrievable and the inhumanity of Dachau overwhelm him. Carefully, he removes his yellow Star of David and replaces it with Horst's pink triangle. Then he throws himself against the electrified fence.

Bent is often sensational, occasionally melodramatic, and, for any number of reasons, deeply troubling. Richard Gere as Max is not altogether convincing, but then, a concentration camp inmate who does pushups in his barracks after a day on the rockpile is not easy to believe. David Dukes turns in a first-rate performance as the high-principled Horst, a man content to be what he is. The play itself lacks coherence in that Sherman veers from the persecution of gays in the action-packed first act to a much narrower focus in the second on the emotional (and distinctly metaphoric) problems of the intensely interesting Max. Whatever its structural inconsistencies, the play delineates unforgettably the rigors of being hell-bent to survive as "bent" in that world where Nazism determined who was "straight." Inevitably, it leaves audiences wondering just how far we've come since then.

The drawings in this issue are by Leon Peters, North Adams State College's graphic artist, and Susan Morris, who resides in East Dover, Vermont.